History, Legend and Treaty Port Ideology, 1925–1931

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I WOULD LIKE TODAY to discuss the use of history by the non-missionary treaty port communities in China in the later 1920s, that is the interpretations of the history of Sino-British relations preferred and the choice of events commonly referred to. It deals with a few of the themes which pervade treaty port writings and the discourse revealed in public debates and in private papers during the years of upheaval in the foreign communities between the May 30th shootings in 1925 and the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September 1931. As will be shown even such distant events as the Macartney embassy were the subject of live debate.

The treaty port communities required, as all communities do, legends to bolster their technical legitimacy and define themselves. These legends formed an important part of the ideas transmitted during the socialisation of Britons arriving in the treaty port communities.[1] They were passed on to new arrivals as justifications, both of their presence in China and of their continued right to stay there in the face of Chinese nationalism. These historical, and contemporary, legends were widely transmitted, orally in the club bars and dinner parties that marked out the social round of treaty port life, through newspapers and magazine articles, through histories of the foreign presence written by treaty port residents and also through fictions such as those by James Bennett, Dorothy Graham, Alice Tisdale Hobart and Bertram Lenox Simpson.[2]

[1] For an account of socialisation in the British treaty port communities see R. A. Bickers, 'Changing British Attitudes to China and the Chinese, 1928–1931', Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1992, pp. 77–122.

[2] *Oriental Affairs*, a Shanghai-based British-edited news magazine reprinted excerpts from Hunter's *The Fankwae at Canton* in 1937 and it was common to find in it articles, for example, on 'Jesuits at the Court of Peking', 'A Forgotten British Embassy — Colonel Charles Cathcart' or 'Shanghai's Cemeteries and Monuments: History Engraved on Stone', *Oriental Affairs*, 1935–1941, passim. For fictions see, for example, Dorothy Graham, *The China Venture* (London, 1929); Alice Tisdale Hobart, *Pidgin Cargo* (London, 1929); Veronica and Paul King, *The Commissioner's Dilemma: An International Tale of the China of Yesterday* (London, 1929), forward.

The attitudes acquired and bolstered in this socialisation militated against Britons adopting anything but a hostile attitude towards the diplomatic concessions necessitated by the victory of the *Guomindang* in 1927. The privileges, and indeed the livelihoods, of the majority of treaty port Britons were widely thought to depend on the perpetuation of the unequal relationship with the Chinese founded on the treaties of the previous century and the structures of informal empire. The direct influence of treaty port residents on the diplomatic process is questionable. Their ability to inflame the situation indubitable. A clear examination of treaty port ideology is, therefore, necessary. The following is a tentative sketch of the main themes to be found. Treaty port ideology was more than just imperial thinking with local characteristics. It had a life of its own and sought for its legitimacy within the whole scope of its own history, from the Macartney mission to the Nanjing Incident of 1927.

THE CANON

Principal among these interpretations of the history of the treaty ports was what can only be described by the neologism 'mudflat-ism'; that is the common belief that the treaty ports and concessions had been mud flats or marshes before the arrival of the Europeans. This, while usually technically true carried the implied and frequently explicit gloss that the Europeans had been solely responsible for constructing the successful ports and industries of modernising China. It also suggested that the continued foreign presence was vital to the economic health of the country.[1]

The myth of quick money and easy living in China was still strong. Certainly fortunes were made in China and the obituarists and leader writers on the *North China Daily News* never let people forget this. 'Rags to riches' (and thence to charity) stories were the stuff of the legends by which the foreign community characterized itself.[2] This myth often merged with sentimental accounts of the advantages of treaty port living. It was compounded by the sense of isolation in the smaller British communities, and by perceived racial threats, especially during the May 30th boycott move-

[1] *North China Herald* [*NCH*], 3/3/28, p. 336; F. L. Hawks Pott, *A Short History of Shanghai: Being an Account of the Growth and Development of the International Settlement* (Shanghai, 1928), p. 1; Rodney Gilbert, *What's Wrong with China* (London, 1926), p. 291; W. E. Soothill, *China and England* (London, 1928), pp. 61–85; *Directory and Chronicle of China and Japan ... 1932* (Hong Kong, 1932), p. 858; R. d'Auxion De Ruffé, *Is China Mad?* (Shanghai, 1928), pp. 259–60; War Office, *Notes on Shanghai* (London, 1928), pp. 6, 16.

[2] 'A Great Romance of Shanghai: Death of a Resident who once Slept on the Bund and Who Gave £50,000 to a Museum', *NCH*, 21/4/28, p. 104.

ment and subsequent events. For one British Shanghai policeman Zhenjiang in 1925 was:

> (like Foochow) a glimpse of the 'good old China' of the earlier White men, when lavish ... hospitality was the keynote of everything. In olden days in ports like this the foreigner did very little work ... made money easily and spent it easily.[1]

This had a diminishing basis in reality, (there were 85 unemployed Shanghai Britons registered as searching for work in August 1932[2]) but it appears to have influenced the behaviour and motivations of many people.

Within the British communities there were other more practical unifying legends. The Britons lionized in China were not the Jardines, Dents, Keswicks or Swires, whose activities had established the British in China, but the imperialists such as General Gordon (after whom the headquarters of the Tientsin British Municipal Council was named) and Sir Harry Parkes and Robert Hart, both of whose statues stood on the Shanghai Bund. These business communities saw their forebears then not as men of trade but as men of war and Empire, not as men who cooperated with the Chinese but as men who fought them, advised them, saved them and organized them in such a way as benefited the foreign powers.[3]

Key events in this imperial history included the foreign presence in the Qing anti-Taiping armies, the 1854 'Battle of the Muddy Flats' which marked the foundation of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps [SVC], and the Boxer battles.[4] The 1926 Wanxian Incident was immediately portrayed by the treaty port press as a British military victory solidly within this tradition

[1] Tinkler papers, Letter to Edith 16/12/25. Sir Eric Teichman described treaty port life as 'cheap and easy living, with the good natured and industrious Chinese always at beck and call', *Affairs of China* (London, 1938), pp. 138–39; 282.

[2] *NCH*, 3/8/32, pp. 165, 178.

[3] O. M. Green, *The Foreigner in China* (London, 1943), pp. 111–26; O. D. Rasmussen, *Tientsin: An Illustrated Outline History* (Tianjin, 1925), pp. 113–27; C. A. Montalto de Jesus' *Historic Shanghai* (Shanghai, 1909), is dedicated to Gordon; F. Maze's papers are replete with his idolisation of Hart, Maze papers, SOAS; see also his subordinate S. Wright's *Hart and the Chinese Customs* (Belfast, 1950), esp. pp. xiii–xv. An exception is the work officially sponsored by the SMC, G. Lanning and S. Couling, *The History of Shanghai, Part 1* (Shanghai, 1921), pp. 459–71, The Gordon industry was still in action in 1933 when B. M. Allen's *Gordon in China* was published in London recounting: 'one of the most dramatic pages in English history, while the cruel cunning of his Chinese colleagues serves to bring out the unselfish heroism of the young English commander', p. vi.

[4] On the role played by the formation of the SVC and the Battle of Muddy Flat in Shanghai mythology see, for example, Pott, *Short History of Shanghai*, pp. 26–30, .

of imperial militarism.[1] These beliefs had practical consequences. They provided rationales for treaty port attacks on British government policy and the activities of British officials in China.[2] It has been noted that the British Empire's heroic myths were in fact 'primarily military' and these local variants emphasized the imperial nature, and by implication importance, of the British presence in China.[3] They also reflected the fact that around a third of British males in Shanghai were involved in the Shanghai Volunteer Corps or the Police Specials. The theatre of treaty port life included a great deal of route-marching, mass inspections, military tattoos, and military funerals.[4]

THE BOXER RISING AND THE SEPOY MUTINY

The Boxer rising provided a great part of the raw material of historical debate. It was also important to the missionary community with its long professional interest in persecution and martyrdom. Many of the participants were still alive in the late 1920s. In 1924 Naval Commander, and later author, Charles Drage was entertained at dinner by Consul Sir Meyrick Hewlett's account of the Legation Siege; a young banker was also told similar first-hand stories in 1929. The treaty port press kept memories active, with articles on sites of foreign historical interest, or early European graveyards.[5] For others nationalism was 'boxerism' (heightened, fanatical, almost insane, mass anti-foreignism), especially when it was allied with anti-Christian movements. In early 1925 one naval officer recorded in his journal that: 'The trouble at Shanghai gets worse every day ... There are other serious things as well; such as anti-foreign risings in Hankow. It looks as if there might be another Boxer rising.'[6] The organisation of underground

[1] *The Wanhsien Epic*, reprinted from the *Central China Post* (Hankou, 1926): 'the account of a very courageous attempt on the part of a mere handful of men to rescue their fellow-countrymen and uphold the honour of the flag', enclosure, in China Letter 1129/1041/417, 17/9/26, ADM116\2497. For details of the incident itself see E. S. K. Fung, *The Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat: Britain's South China Policy, 1924–1931* (Hong Kong, 1991), p. 132.

[2] 'Our diplomats of the Victorian era were of a different mettle,' wrote 'British Trader' in the *North China Daily News* [*NCDN*], 15/8/27, p. 4.

[3] John M. Mackenzie, 'Heroic Myths of Empire', John M. Mackenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 113, 134.

[4] Bickers, 'Changing British Attitudes', pp. 104–105.

[5] Imperial War Museum, C. H. Drage papers, Journal, 24/9/24; B. C. Allan, Narrative, 11/5/63, Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank Archives, S16.1 Personal Narratives; on the press see, for example, the articles on 'British Memorials in Peking' in *NCDN*, 13/8/27, p. 11; ibid., 15/8/27, p. 7.

[6] Imperial War Museum, Simms papers, Journal, 17/1/25, see also 2/6/25. B. L. Simpson ('Putnam Weale') put forward this connection in his *Why China Sees Red* (New

communist movements also struck some observers as being as secretive and fanatical as the Boxers were supposed to have been.

A modernised version of the Boxer 'outrages' may be seen in reactions to, and the totemic use of, the Nanjing Incident in March 1927. When the National Revolutionary Army occupied the city several foreigners were killed and others only rescued after an American warship laid down an artillery barrage to cover them.[1] It also arose during the publicity generated by the case of John Thorburn, a young Briton who went missing near Shanghai in 1931 and who was later found to have been summarily executed in Chinese military custody having fatally shot two policemen:

> Are there any indications that these ancient people warped by centuries of custom and prejudice have in less than a generation changed their hearts, have they become more civilised or milder in their disposition?

asked the proposer of a motion at a public meeting of British residents in Tianjin which was called to censure the Legation for inactivity over the matter.[2]

History was resorted too for other proofs: as the Chinese were held to be characteristically cruel, opponents of the rendition of extraterritoriality claimed it would lead to a repetition of the judicial cruelties inflicted on Britons in the years before 1842 (which were often itemised in commentaries to emphasize this point).[3] The appeal to history was often based on assumptions of the unchangeability and consequent predictability of the Chinese character. The British Minister in China, Sir Miles Lampson, and the Foreign Secretary, Sir Austen Chamberlain, exchanged letters on the

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York, 1925), p. 29. J. W. Bennett's novels *The Yellow Corsair* (London, 1928) and *Son of the Typhoon* (London, 1929) were quite typical in the mixing of topical plot themes — the Shaji incident and the May 30th incident respectively — and portrayals of 'Yellow Peril' anti-foreign activities related to images of the Boxer rising. For a recent examination of the historiography of the movement see Paul A. Cohen, 'The Contested Past: The Boxers as History and Myth', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 51:1 (February 1992), pp. 82–113.

[1] North China Daily News, *China in Chaos* (Shanghai, 1926), p. 1; see also Rodney Gilbert in *NCH*, 16/4/27, p. 114. Drage papers, Journal 24/9/24. For an example of Nanjing's mythologisation see Nora Waln, *Within the Walls of Nanking* (London, 1928).

[2] Mr Dickinson, Tientsin British Committee of Information, Memorandum 31, 29/9/31, 'The Tientsin Resolution', SOAS, Royal Institute of International Affairs papers, Box 10.

[3] Soothill, *China and England*, pp. 32–41; Putnam Weale, *Why China*, pp. 323–32; H. G. W. Woodhead, *A Journalist in China* (London, 1934), p. 261.

lessons to be discerned for the present in the history of Sino-British relations immediately preceding the first opium war, and from the fact that Chinese civilization was 'static'. Chamberlain agreed with Lampson that

> those vexatious anti-foreign practices which were stopped by the treaties of last century would re-appear in all their virulence if the restraining influence of the treaties was too suddenly removed.

Lampson held that the problems stemmed from the 'racial characteristics of the Chinese governing classes'.[1] Arthur H. Smith's 1892 *Chinese Characteristics*, which was also predicated on a static view of the Chinese character, was still, in the 1920s, a good seller and widely recommended reading.[2]

It has recently been pointed out how the immediately posthumous missionary discourse on the Boxer rising often equated it with the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny.[3] The comparison was widely used. In the 1920s visitors to the British Legation compound were shown a 'Lest We Forget' wall with genuine bullet holes from the siege (which still existed in 1950), or the Water Gate through which the allied troops entered the city.[4] Both of these routines were conscious recreations in the mode of memorials in India.[5]

The association with the Mutiny was not, however, only made in relation to the Boxers. 'One thought instinctively of Lucknow' wrote Naval Chaplain Scott when he saw Chongqing's Asiatic Petroleum Company installation besieged by Chinese troops but flying the Union Jack in 1926. Scott was not alone in using the Lucknow simile; Louise Jordan Miln's authorial voice used it to describe the situation in Shanghai in January 1927

[1] Lampson to Chamberlain, No. 1006, 15/9/27, FO228/3587/43 3, and Chamberlain to Lampson, 16/11/27 FO No. 1326 (F8314/2/10) FO228/3732/1 3.

[2] On the persistence of Smith's book see Bickers, 'Changing British Attitudes', pp. 30–31. See also C. W. Hayford, 'Arthur H. Smith and his China Book', in S. W. Barnett and J. K. Fairbank, eds., *Christianity in China: Early Protestant Missionary Writings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985), pp. 153–74.

[3] James Hevia, 'Leaving a Brand on China: Missionary Discourse in the Wake of the Boxer Movement', *Modern China*, 18:3, (July 1992), p. 322.

[4] Ann Bridge, *The Ginger Griffin* (London, 1934), p. 49; Daniele Varé, *The Last of the Empresses: and the Passing from the Old China to the New* (London, 1936 [1938 edition]), pp. 218–19. For information about the debate within the British embassy in 1950 about the 'Lest We Forget' wall, which then still survived, I am indebted to Mr. Derek Bryan.

[5] On the Indian model see Bernard S. Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India', in E. J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 178–79, and Charles Allen, *Plain Tales from the Raj: Images of British India in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1975), p. 57.

as the Northern Expedition neared the city.[1] Nor was the association of violence in China with that in India restricted to the previous century. The Amritsar Massacre and the shootings on May 30th 1925 in Shanghai were often compared; by critics but also by supporters of the police action that day. General Dyer's ruthlessness in India, which was largely acquitted in the court of British colonial and public opinion, as being absolutely necessary, was a precedent pointed to by those who felt the SMP had nothing to apologize for.[2]

These historical associations took place in the context of the colonial self-image of the British in China: Lucknow was certainly one of the great clichés of the British imperial story by this point but its use indicates how many Britons looked at the situation both in the treaty ports and also outside them in what was, let us not forget, independent and un-colonised China. It is also as well to remember that many of the social and business structures of the Raj were carted off to China; this even included the vocabulary of British India: tiffin, lakh, shroff, godown, coolie, bund, boy, chit.[3] Sikh policemen were used in the British concession in Hankou and in the British dominated Shanghai International Settlement (it was a detachment of Sikhs who were ordered to open fire in 1925).

IMPERIAL PRESTIGE

The underlying factor behind this choice of historical references was that the treaty port British saw themselves as constituting a colonial society. The maintenance of this colonialism lay in the protection of their prestige in China. The spectre of humiliation was an important issue. Avoidance of humiliation and maintenance of prestige were often key factors in British diplomatic tardiness and heavy-handedness.

[1] Imperial War Museum, Scott papers, Letter to his sisters, 23/10/26. 'There were Englishmen in Shanghai who thought of Lucknow,' Miln, *The Flutes of Shanghai* (London, 1928), p. 153.

[2] On comparisons with Amritsar see N. R. Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire: Westerners in Shanghai and the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s* (Hanover and London, 1991), p. 105. On Dyer see D. Sayer, 'British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre 1919–1920', *Past and Present*, 131 (May 1991), pp. 130–64. The two SMP officers eventually forced to resign over the May 30th shootings received a combined annual total of £2,000 in pensions. By 1941 they had in fact received in total more than was belatedly given in compensation to relatives of the victims of the shooting in 1930, SMC, *Annual Report*, 1926–1941; Lampson to FO No. 168, 11/2/30, FO228/4132/2 2f.

[3] John Swire and Sons, Swire Archives, Oral History Transcripts, No. 5, p. 2: 'Having been in India I had an idea of what Eastern life was like'. Lionel Curtis, felt that 'The British ... are badly handicapped by traditions established in their earlier contact with India ...,' 'Notes on China', SOAS RIIA, Box 8, p. 20.

Upholding prestige involved practicalities. These included the physical structures of the British establishment in China: the gunboats,[1] control of the Customs, and the large Legation in Beijing. This 'city within a city within a city' accommodated some 2,000 people and according to one Minister: 'There is no other Legation that can compare with it; either for beauty or for dignity'.[2] The Consulates and Consulates-General throughout China fulfilled similar functions.[3] So did the foreign monuments and graveyards scattered throughout China. Reginald Johnston was worried that the return of the leased territory of Weihaiwei to China in 1930 would be followed by the destruction of British monuments and:

> the creation of a legend that the inhabitants of the Territory, having been ground under a merciless foreign yoke for over thirty years, had welcomed their liberators with tears of joy.

This was a real fear. Memorials to German rule in Qingdao were destroyed in 1930. Chinese nationalism was also sensitive about physical reminders of Western triumphs.[4]

The *Guomindang* set up their capital in Nanjing and changed Beijing's name to Beiping partly to expunge associations with the corrupt Northern governments and their subjection to the foreign powers. The British Legation remained in Beijing until 1935 and it is clear that despite the 'practical' reasons often elaborated against an earlier move the motivation was one of prestige. A new Legation would have none of the dignity nor the historical associations — of the Legation siege and the allied victory — of that in Beijing. Nanjing had also acquired humiliating overtones as a result of the Nanking Incident.[5] Furthermore, scuttling down to the Yangzi looked uncomfortably like kowtowing to a childish Nationalist whim.[6] Any

[1] Ichang No. 47, 2/12/30, FO228\4190\13 22r.

[2] On this perception of the Customs see FO No. 360, 8/1/30, enc. No. 2 China Confidential F6720/3/10 'British Policy in China', FO228\4134\25 3. On the Legation see Sir Owen O'Malley, *The Phantom Caravan* (London, 1954), p. 95; Lampson to Chamberlain, 9/3/27, FO800\260; the Anglophile Dutch Minister Oudendyk felt the Legation 'must make an Englishman legitimately proud of his country', *Ways and By Ways in Diplomacy* (London, 1939), p. 27.

[3] Although it was hardly dignified for the Kunming Consul-General to be living in 'a ramshackle Chinese house' leased in the name of the Governor's mistress who was trying to reclaim it, H. Phillips, 'Inspection of Yunnanfu Consulate-General', 2/3/29, FO369\2705 K5497/5497/210.

[4] Weihaiwei No. 8, 18/2/30, FO228\4253\46 51a.

[5] The temper of the times can also be gauged from the documents published in the *China Year Book*, pp. 723–36.

[6] Lampson, 'Meeting with the Spanish Ambassador', 5/7/28, FO228\3797\5 21g. The reasons spelled out in 1930 were practical ones about moving, political instability in

such concessions would only lead to 'accentuated arrogance' on the part of the Chinese, as was the result, it was claimed, of foreign representation at the State Funeral of Sun Yatsen in Nanjing in 1929.[1]

The fear of losing prestige was a recurrent theme in conservative treaty port arguments. It was entwined with notions deriving from the discourse on white race supremacy in East Asia (felt to be on the defensive after Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905)) but also sought analogies in history — Sir Miles Lampson was not alone in finding in history proof of Chinese racial characteristics.

THE USES OF HISTORY

The function of the recourse to history was mainly two-fold. Firstly it provided a focus and shape for what was otherwise a transient society — especially for those not working for the big China companies which with their own traditions and securities. There is a clearly identifiable class aspect to this — many of the most virulent users of history were lower-middle class Britons working in treaty port service sectors whose livelihoods depended on the perpetuation of the concessions and extraterritoriality. A company like Jardines, however, provided its employees with its own history and legends, even, in Shanghai, its own war memorial and its own Armistice Day ceremony.[2] Employees of such companies were perhaps more likely to identify in the first instance with the company then with the treaty port communities.

It must not be forgotten that the foreign community was subject to a steady turnover in its constituent population as older residents retired and younger men arrived (it was, overwhelmingly, a male society). It was as necessary then for *Oriental Affairs* to remind such new arrivals in 1938 of what happened 'When China Went Red', during the period of Soviet-*Guomindang*

Central China and the heat in Nanjing, 'it would clearly be mad to think of it yet', wrote Lampson to the Foreign Office, No. 143, 27/5/30, FO228\4135\1 3f. On the issue of the change from Beijing to Beiping, although approval was given for the use of 'Peiping' instead of 'Peking' in local communications, few consuls seem to have done so with any consistency. The Foreign Office did not intend, at that point, to use the name when communicating with the Chinese Legation in London, Orde to Lampson, FO No. 1169, 16/12/29, FO228\4169\1 13g.

[1] See Lampson's paraphrase of the analysis of U. S. Consul Price, to FO No. 113, 24/6/29, FO228\3937/420.

[2] *NCH*, 17/11/28, p. 253.

cooperation in the 1920s, as it was to instil the tenets of the longer-term treaty port history.[1]

Secondly, it gave a sense of historical legitimacy to defenders of the Western communities. A community with a history is a real community. The vision of treaty port history which stressed the ascendancy of Western contributions and the haughty, cruel actions of the Chinese gave treaty port Britons something to fight for that, transparently, was not just the reactionary self-interest that domestic opinion tarred them with — famously summed up by Arthur Ransome as the 'Shanghai Mind'.[2] To this purpose modern legends continued to be made: it was claimed that the Foreign Office had betrayed the treaty port British, especially over the Nationalist seizure of the British concession Hankou in January 1927; mission educationalists had 'bolshevised' China's students; the Nanjing incident was described as a planned Nationalist trial for the attack on Shanghai. These legends had the function of uniting the community against hostile outsiders, or those it felt endangered the 'good old China': Whitehall, foreign liberals, the *Guomindang*, and especially against the Chinese in general. They also represented a convenient simplification of recent political history for new arrivals to learn. It is clear that they did so.[3]

ECHOES OF THE MACARTNEY EMBASSY

It comes as no surprise to find that the Macartney mission was allotted its place in the repertoire of historical examples and moral tales. The influential Shanghai journalist Rodney Gilbert, for example, declared in 1929 that the Macartney Embassy did more harm than good and succeeded only in enrolling 'Great Britain among the tribute-bearing appendages of the Manchu throne' and fuelling the arrogance and truculence of Chinese officialdom.[4] The stigma of the *koutou*, whether technical or metaphorical, remained. Sir Frederick Maze was vilified in the treaty port press for swearing an oath of loyalty to the Guomindang and to Sun Yatsen's *sanminzhuyi* ['three principles of the people'] and also bowing his head to a portrait of Sun on his inauguration as Inspector-General of the Chinese

[1] *Oriental Affairs*, August 1938, pp. 82–86.
[2] Arthur Ransome, *The Chinese Puzzle* (London, 1927), pp. 28–32. On the question of the bad public image of the foreign community in China see my *Changing Shanghai's 'Mind': Publicity, Reform and the British in Shanghai, 1927–1931* (London, 1992), pp. 1–4, 17–18.
[3] See, for example, J. O. P. Bland on the 'Foreign Office School of Thought', *China: The Pity of It* (London, 1932), pp. 176–97. For a contemporary attempt at debunking the Nanjing rape-myths see *China Weekly Review*, 28/5/27, p. 342.
[4] *The Unequal Treaties: China and the Foreigner* (London, 1929), p. 81.

Maritime Customs in 1929.[1] More interestingly, in 1930 the ratepayers annual meeting of the Shanghai Municipal Council was roused by a British lawyer into overthrowing what was planned by its proposers to be a rubber-stamp motion to increase Chinese representation on the Council, causing a minor crisis. The lawyer declared that passing 'this resolution ... would appear to be an act of fawning sycophancy ... they will not thank you if you pass it. They will only laugh at your weakness and your folly'. To back up his argument he finished with a sizeable quotation from Qianlong's letter to George III as proof of the characteristic hostility and arrogance of the Chinese to foreigners, concluding that this 'spirit in its undiluted form is still to be found in many influential circles in China today'.[2]

The implications of this use of history for British reactions to the rise of nationalism in 1920s China were tangible. It fuelled the conservatism of treaty port reactions, coloured the tutelary and dismissive vocabulary of British businessmen and the underscored the pervasive sense of friendship spurned and guardianship wronged. Britain's retreat from China in the 1920s and 1930s was a stubborn, slow and bad-tempered affair. In times of heightened tension the language resorted to by those under threat was often colourful and usually extreme, and perhaps unrelated to more sober thinking. On that basis it is tempting to downplay the importance of the themes to be found. However, it is more likely to be the case that concepts resorted to *in extremis* reflect more closely the tangible beliefs of their articulators. They certainly reveal the strength of the socialisation process in the treaty port communities.

This paper has been concerned with the treaty port communities and their defenders in a period when they felt equally threatened by Chinese nationalism and changes in Britain's policy towards China. It highlights a trend that did not begin in this period, nor end with it. It is clear that the most important work had yet to be done. The real turning point came with the years of tension before Pearl Harbour. Many treaty port Britons initially saw in Japan's actions in China after 1931 a vindication of their own conservatism and imperialism, and an accomplishment of their own desires. As tensions with the Japanese were heightened — notably during the Tianjin dispute and in the politics of the Shanghai International Settlement between 1939 and 1941 — British perceptions shifted. The Chinese became British allies. The initially pro-Japanese political lobby, the British Residents' Association, became a community support organisation after

[1] Bickers, 'Changing British Attitudes', p. 106.
[2] *NCH*, 22/4/30, p. 148.

December 7th 1941.[1] For British residents internment by the Japanese appeared to have wiped away memories of the pre-war atmosphere and dominant attitudes. Halcyon days of Sino-British cooperation and joint opposition to the Japanese menace stretched back endlessly from 1941.

[1] Bickers, 'Changing British Attitudes', pp. 164–66, 247, 248.